(c) the number of fishermen released by those countries till now and the total number of fishermen still under imprisonment during the last ten years?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) to (c) As per available information, Pakistan had released 623 Indian fishermen during the year 2003, and 412 Indian fishermen are presently under Pakistan's custody who were arrested during the period October, 2003 to August, 2004.

Sri Lankan authorities arrested 52 Indian fishermen during the year 2004.46 fishermen were released and six are at present in their custody.

Government, through diplomatic channels, have been consistently taking up the issue of the release of the Indian fishermen alongwith their boats with the Pakistani and Sri Lankan authorities.

Associating China with SAARC

2455. SHRI KALRAJ MISHRA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether during the recent SAARC Foreign Minister's meet in Islamabad the question of associating China with SAARC for integrated economic development of the region was considered;

(b) if so.the decision taken in this regard; and

(c) the steps taken so far in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) During the 25th meeting of the Council of Ministers of SAARC, held in Islamabad on July 20-21, 2004, the issue was considered.

(b) and (c) The meeting authorized the Secretary General to submit a Note on modalities for establishing dialogue partnership taking into account, *inter alia,* experience of other regional organizations like ASEAN with a view to arriving at a decision on this subject during the Thirteenth SAARC Summit in Dhaka in January, 2005. The Note is under preparation by the SAARC Secretariat.